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Roscoe Drummond Reports

U-2 Probe Seen Revealing Loose Rein Before Summit

WASHINGTON

The thoroughly fair-minded Fulbright committee hearing is revealing some grave shortcomings in the Administration's handling of the U-2 plane incident, although one aspect of the President's conduct of the affair seems to me to be strengthened.

The most damaging disclosure is that there was never any considered, specific high-level examination of whether the U-2 flights should be suspended prior to the summit. This suggests a grievous oversight and a looseness of reins at the top of an operation which by any standard demanded close and continuous scrutiny.



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The hearing has also revealed a gaping lack of co-ordination among the White House, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, and between the State Department and its official spokesman, which resulted in contradictory and embarrassing public statements.

On the other hand, Mr. Eisenhower's reasons for telling the obvious but rarely admitted truth that the President is personally responsible for the nation's undercover intelligence activities, became more persuasive in light of the testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Understandably Secretary Herter sought to put the best possible face upon the Administration's handling of the whole matter. At the very outset of the inquiry, Mr. Herter affirmed as one of his "central points" that "the decision not to suspend this program of flights at the summit meeting approached, was a sound decision."

But the alert Sen. Fulbright was not deflected by the bare implication that the "central point" of the flights was a careful "decision" by the authority. He pressed Mr. Herter to say who made the decision, and whether there was thorough consideration of summit consequences. The Secretary was forced to back away from his contention that the Administration reviewed the flights in light of the summit. This fact emerges from the following Q-and-A:

Fulbright—"Was such a decision taken?"

Herter—"That I can't tell you, I was not a party to it."

Fulbright—"You say that the decision not to suspend the flights as the summit approached was a sound decision. Was there any decision taken not to suspend them?"

Herter—"I did not interpose any objection to them because of any diplomatic event that was coming up."

to suspend them, is that correct?"

Herter—"That is right."

There you are. There can be an honest difference of opinion whether the flights should have been suspended on the eve of the summit. It is certainly damaging to have to admit that the matter was not even considered at the highest level of government.

The President's decision to take open responsibility for the flights was not casual; it was deliberate. Apparently Mr. Eisenhower felt with some fear that Mr. Khrushchev was simply baiting a trap for him in suggesting that the U-2 flights were being made without his knowledge and approval. He concluded that any such an out would not keep the Soviets from using the incident to explode the summit. He could see Mr. Khrushchev just waiting for such a disclaimer so he could come back with the argument that the United States war-mongers in the Pentagon were an even greater peril to peace on the thus admitted ground that the President could not control their actions.

The Administration can reasonably contend that since Mr. Khrushchev negotiated with the President at Camp David knowing that the U-2 flights were taking place, it was not the fact of the flights which caused him to refuse to negotiate at Paris.

But on balance it is clear that the Administration's handling of the matter showed grave deficiencies and will be a legitimate aspect of campaign debate.

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